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## ANTHROPOCENE

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It. *Antropocene*; Fr. *Anthropocène*; Germ. *Anthropozän*; Sp. *Antropoceno*. The term Anthropocene is a compound of Greek origin, formed from the words “human”, ἄνθρωπος (*anthropos*), and “new”, καινός (*kainos*), which generally means “human epoch”. This term was introduced into the scientific debate in 2000 by Paul Crutzen, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1995. Together with Eugene Stoermer, Crutzen developed this concept to describe a new epoch of the earth’s history, in which many of its conditions and processes have been profoundly altered by human beings and in which humankind has become a geological force. Although the concept of the Anthropocene emerged in a scientific field, it has been taken up by various disciplines, thus being used not only in science but also in humanities, artistic practices, and society. In philosophy, the Anthropocene crosses the boundaries between philosophy of science, ethics, and aesthetics, raising new questions about the relationship between humankind and the environment (or environments) and giving new life to crucial criticisms related to the distinction between science, culture, and nature.

### A GROUNDBREAKING CONCEPT

Paul Crutzen’s introduction of the concept of the Anthropocene at the Cuernavaca Conference in Mexico in 2000 was a groundbreaking moment. His claim was that the Holocene had come to an end, giving way to the Anthropocene – an epoch in which humans have become a geological force, changing the substance of the earth and producing the climatic changes that have modified and now threaten their permanence on the planet (Crutzen 2002). This shift – which on a theoretical level was preceded by reflections of scientists such as Antonio Stoppani, George Perkins Marsh and Vladimir Vernadsky, who described the current age as an “Anthropozoic” or “anthropogenic” epoch – had an immediate impact within the scientific community, which has since taken up the problem of verifying the scientific consistency of this definition through the criteria of stratigraphy, by identifying a new phase and geological layer of the earth.

From a strictly scientific point of view, the term *Anthropocene* has provoked controversial discussions among members of the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) and the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). Its validity has been investigated, tested, and supported by the Anthropocene Working Group, which views the Anthropocene as a potentially formal unit of the International Chronostratigraphic Chart (Zalasiewicz et al. 2019).

At the same time, precisely because of its critical disruptiveness, this notion has cut across the boundaries of scientific discourse, becoming a field of reflection for several disciplines and practices, including the humanities, the environmental sciences, sociology, and even ecology and activism. The Anthropocene has become a (both practical and theoretical) planetary and transdisciplinary notion – a “threshold concept” that “challenges us to think counter-intuitive relations of scale, effect, perception, knowledge, representation and calculability” (Clark 2015, 13).

#### TRANSDISCIPLINARY RELEVANCE AND CRITIQUE

The Anthropocene implies a radical spatio-temporal rethinking of the planet. The concept of a clash of scales poses fundamental challenges to the way in which the planet is perceived, investigated, and represented. The problem of setting a date to the Anthropocene has also been the subject of multiple interpretations. Four possible phases and events have been identified as potential markers of its emergence (Horn, Bergthaller 2019): the Great Acceleration in the mid-20th century, the Industrial Revolution, the Columbian Exchange, and finally, the birth of the species *Homo sapiens* itself. These different perspectives highlight fundamental moments in the relationship between humankind and the planet, but setting the date has emerged as a significant problem that has motivated various critiques of the concept of the Anthropocene.

Even though proponents of the concept of the Anthropocene aim to raise awareness of humanity’s impact on the planet, the appropriation and exploitation of natural resources, multispecies, and the complexity of the earth’s systems, this notion has been criticized as anthropocentric and as embodying a “humanistic mindset” (Crist in Moore 2016, 25). A main pillar of this critique, which has contributed to the emergence of a post-Anthropocene approach, is the claim that discussions of the Anthropocene have thus far been based on a homogeneous, global view of humankind as a collective entity that shares responsibility for the climate emergency. Historical events such as colonisation, critically investigated by Dipesh Chakrabarty, were in fact driven by specific groups of people who profited from specific political-economic systems. The idea of an Anthropocene thus risks generalising human impact. Alternative terms have therefore been proposed, bringing to light specific aspects that the term Anthropocene risks obscuring. In this regard, emphasis has been placed on the Capitalocene, from a perspective that focuses on the political-economic structures that underlie capitalism’s impact on the earth, understood “as a way of organising nature – as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology” (Moore 2016, 6). Advocates of the notion of the Plantationocene aim to highlight the “devastating transformation of different kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations” (Haraway 2015, 162), while those who prefer the notion of the Plasticene aim to underscore the ecological, political, economic, and cultural

impact of plastics (Davis 2015). In any case, the concept of the Anthropocene is inextricably linked to reflection on *Post-humanism* (Braidotti 2013) and on the *Technosphere* (Haff 2019), in which human agency is renegotiated and repositioned with respect to the realm of technology. Critical aesthetics, for its part, engages with the question “How does the Anthropocene enter into visibility, and what are its politics of representation?” (Demos 2017, 10), seeking to reveal medial uses of this concept and to highlight technical images of the planet and catastrophic rhetoric that instrumentalise it in order to anesthetise politics (Demos 2017, Kurgan 2014). The Anthropocene has inaugurated a shift in thinking about complex spatio-temporal entities that Timothy Morton has defined as “hyperobjects”: “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” and that have a “high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time” (Morton 2013, 1).

Following Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 20), who wrote that a “concept is a heterogenesis – that is to say, an ordering of its components by zones of neighbourhood”, we might say that the Anthropocene is a concept that has been befriended by philosophy. As a space of critique, theoretical revision, further clarification, and the generation of alternative concepts, it has become a theoretical and practical space in which different paradigm shifts converge, acquiring new critical force and motivating new practices. On a theoretical level, the idea of the Anthropocene, understood as a radically critical (not instrumental) concept of humanity in its concreteness and historical diversity, touches on three fundamental issues: (1) the relationship between humankind and the environment; (2) the relationship between the natural and the artificial; and (3) the relationship between science and knowledge with respect to materiality and mediality. The Anthropocene implies a rethinking of the dichotomous and dualistic approach at the heart of modern science, which is a fundamental theme in the phenomenological reflections of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, and Gaston Bachelard and also in the more recent reflections of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. From this perspective, the Anthropocene motivates a reinterpretation of the relationship between theory and practice, extending and grounding an idea that seeks to become an ecology of practices. Such an ecology “is a tool for thinking through what is happening, and a tool is never neutral” (Stengers 2005, 185).

One advantage of the notion of the Anthropocene, including the criticisms that have arisen from it, is that it avoids reducing the project of repositioning human beings to a mere reparative gesture; on the contrary, it implies a new field of “ethical-aesthetic” practices that, for example, was already at the basis of Felix Guattari’s *ecosophy*, based on the three ecologies that articulate social, mental, and environmental relations (Guattari 2000). In this regard, the Anthropocene is to be understood not merely as a diagnosis but as a critical challenge that includes a transformation and a practical attitude. As Latour writes, “some are readying themselves to live as Earthbound in the Anthropocene; others decided to remain as Humans in the Holocene” (Latour 2014, 63).

The notion of the Anthropocene, criticized by some as a “Promethean self-portrait” (Crist in Moore 2016, 16), has motivated a series of alternative perspectives that pose the question of how we might radically transform our relation to the earth, opening space for new transdisciplinary practices capable of inaugurating synthetic and dynamic relationships between humankind and the planet and surpassing the

project of domesticating nature. This integrative, planetary vision is present in various conceptual projects, including the Gaia hypothesis, proposed, among others, by James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis, and Bruno Latour. In this context, Donna Haraway's idea of the *Chthulucene* plays a significant role as a "kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (2015, 2). These theoretical approaches have also prompted the proliferation of concepts such as co-existence and connectedness (Krogh 2020, 118-121, 122-125), which aim to develop a neo-materialistic and situated perspective from which fields of both theory and practice can emerge. This sympoietic perspective has given rise to several fields of practice focused on ways of living on a damaged planet, exploring, for example, the precariousness and urgency of species and seeking to narrate a "third nature" (Tsing 2015) that can overcome the strict dichotomy between humankind and the environment. The real challenge posed by the Anthropocene – and the alternative concepts and objections it has prompted – is that of inaugurating a non-anthropocentric humanism and of unfolding a field (or fields) of planetary multiscalarity embedded within local effects (Raffnsøe 2016).

#### FIELD OF PRACTICES

In both art and architecture, the Anthropocene has led to the development of what H  l  ne Frichot calls "creative ecologies" (2019), which in architecture, in particular, aim to overcome the centrality of the architectural artefact as an object and to extend architecture's field of intervention (Turpin 2013). The idea of the Anthropocene has motivated the search for a deeper understanding of the political, economic, and social networks in which architecture operates, including its technical and material implementation. From this perspective, architecture is recontextualised in relation to the complexity of the territory, as a relational field between different forces. Experimenting with architecture as a medium of investigation and intervention within visible and invisible structures and parameters has motivated the collaborative practice *Design Earth*, led by El Hadi Jazairy and Rania Ghosn; the research agency *Forensic Architecture*, founded by Eyal Weizman; the independent organization *Territorial Agency*, founded by Ann-Sofi R  nnskog and John Palmesino. Other relevant topics with respect to architectural and, more generally, spatial practices concern new ethnographic methods (as in the case of Albena Yaneva) for investigating the social and political impact of architecture and infrastructures. This research implies in some cases the development of experimental diagrams analysing the complex network of effects produced by architecture (Gasperoni 2022). Experimental environmental practices, as in the case of Philippe Rahm's architectural work, are emerging in architecture, and the object of architecture continues to be renegotiated in relation to other species (Baracco et al. 2021) and through theories of critical care and environmental attentiveness that work "toward restorative ecologies and counteracting the long-held separations such as nature from culture, material from life, local from planetary" (Fitz and Krasny 2019, 16).

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